

TREADING THE WINE PRESS OF BOOKS.

A good deal has been said and written from time to time to the discredit of indiscriminate reading, specially novel reading.

Only a short time ago I came across a letter in "L'Umile Pianta" itself, urging the perusal of three solid books which, "not to have read, would be" (in the writer's eyes) "a proof that" those who owned to this lack in their study of standard works, could not be "true educators." But this *obiter dictum* will not hold water, and for this reason.

There can be no "true educator" unless he or she have a properly balanced mind; and in order to have this properly balanced mind it is necessary to read widely—to read so as to be able to be true to one's own personal mental atmosphere, colour, and drift in books, and to read—yes, to read indiscriminately.

I want specially to emphasise this last, because it seems to me that in it lies the secret of the widest education of all.

A certain hospital nurse of my acquaintance used to say when she came across some person whose behaviour and way of going on seemed to her utterly unaccountable: "Ah, well! It takes all sorts to make a world!"

And in the world of books it "takes all sorts" of reading to make a mind thoroughly furnished and perfectly balanced.

It does not therefore follow that I must read such and such a book because you tell me that without doing so I cannot be a "true educator," any more than it follows that you must read some book that has just filled up some corner in my mind that was "to let," so to speak.

I have read some other book of the same sort, perhaps, as the one which seemed so un-do-without-able to you, and vice versa in your case.

There is no absolutely *necessary* book to be read except the Bible and the book of Nature and Human Nature;

because if you read indiscriminately and widely, you cannot fail to come across the teaching or doctrine that is never one man's property alone. If you don't meet with it here, you will there.

The books you consider so indispensable may not be at all the ones that can convey their lesson to me. It is the same thing in books as Mr. Haweis so wisely declared it to be in music: because one teacher was excellent for some people, it does not in the least follow he is good for all. There is in many people's minds a great disposition to disparage the novel as being only "light reading." But without reading the novel you cannot at all develop one side of your mind (always giving you credit for having it, for everyone has not)—the imaginative side.

The novel is the High Priest of Imagination. Without imagination you cannot create. Without the novel your mind must be one-sided; and no one-sided mind is a properly balanced one. The novel must be considered seriously; it must not be taken, as many people do take it, to be the irresponsible part of their reading.

The sphere of the good novel is every bit as great, in a different way, as those three solid books which I mentioned earlier, and as other definitely educational literature.

John Oliver Hobbes, in her recently-published book, "Letters from a Silent Study," mentions the fact that before she was seventeen, "for the mere pleasure of reading . . . without method," she had read all these authors: Shakspeare, Defoe, Swift, Marryat, Judge Hughes, Fielding, Thackeray, Dickens, Dante, George Eliot, Dumas, Besant, William Black, Ouida, Milton, Trollope, Rita, Victor Hugo, Harrison Ainsworth, Goldsmith, Charlotte Brontë, Swinburne, Rhoda Broughton, Thomas Hardy, T. W. Robertson, Tom Taylor, Mrs. Forrester and others. This is indeed treading the wine-press of books that one may drink deep of the juice of the grapes from many and varied vineyards of thought.

And from this wide and indiscriminate reading the mind develops the quality of a well-balanced mental atmosphere—if one may use the phrase. It can hardly be morbid; it can hardly be lopsided; it can hardly be narrow. Love will always teach more thoroughly than method, and will always precede it. To read "for the mere love of reading," is to

ensure that we shall "make our way to the city of the mind," that city of many doors which open as readily to the touch of the indiscriminate reader as to that of the solid plodder.

I. GIBERNE SIEVEKING.

HENRIK IBSEN.

In writing on any great person who has influenced our own time, we are apt either to over, or, on the other hand, to under-estimate the genius which blinds admirers to its faults, and does not reveal itself to the shortsightedness of its opponents. We are too near the bright rays of the star to view its brilliancy coolly. Can we, then, bestow the crown of immortality on an Ibsen, a Gorjikk Sudermann, or Gabriele L'Annunzio? As for the last-named one, we may safely conjecture, or even hope, that future generations will efface the name "eternita" written by himself, and will give us credit for having been able to sift wheat from chaff. Certainly Gabriele L'Annunzio is a poet, but he maculates his talent by heralding forth his own glory.

Ibsen is also a poet, and a great poet, though he may sometimes appear in the garb of a philosopher. Will that northern star, then, shine on beings, centuries hence, as it shone on us? Will he appeal to the feelings of struggling humanity, even if this humanity should have scaled a higher step on the ladder of evolution? I think we may safely answer "yes."

There always will be "Brands" who, with heart and mind turned towards the attainment of a certain goal will, with a firm belief in the infallibility of their motto "All or Nothing," with an apparently cruel intolerance for what they deem weakness in their fellow-creatures, allow no compromise. When a flash of truth reveals to them in their last moment their great failure, will not with this very truth that consolation be theirs, "Whole-heartedness is better than half-heartedness!"

Half-heartedness is not to be found in Brand, but it is embodied in Peer Gynt; and, no doubt, there will always exist human beings who will dream and fancy, but who will never act; and so, being bound down by fetters which chain them for ever to their "ego," will lose their soul, if not redeemed by an all-redeeming love.

And one last point is to be considered, important above all for us women; and not only for us, but, I should think, for women of all times. Ibsen, let us never forget that, does not mean to answer any questions; but he asks them in dreadful earnest, and rouses us to ask too. When the curtain in Ibsen's social plays falls on his women like Hedda, Gabler, Norah, &c., we are left alone to question about the right or wrong of their self-chosen destiny; yet we do not seem to find ourselves in hopeless darkness with no sign-post to show us the way.

There was something amiss which caused his heroines to quit their uncongenial surroundings, and we ask ourselves what was the cause of this something? Marriage, if it shall bring happiness to man and wife, must certainly be founded on love; but it most certainly is not enough for an ideal marriage. Let us examine this unexplored field before entering it with a sober and prosaic mind, in spite of love; but let us never forget that Love is an essential factor to happiness, in spite of sober reflections.

Many of us, after having read Ibsen's plays, will echo the words of Philip H. Wickstead, whose lectures on Henrik Ibsen are well known:—

"If I can find the husband and wife who show me that they have read and understood "The Doll's House," "Rosmersholm," and "The Lady from the Sea," but that they had nothing to learn from them, then I will lay down Ibsen, and ask leave to sit at their feet.

"But I do not expect that this will be either to-day or to-morrow."

HELENE HANSSDING.